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Lost in Austin -- "Why I Don't Blog"

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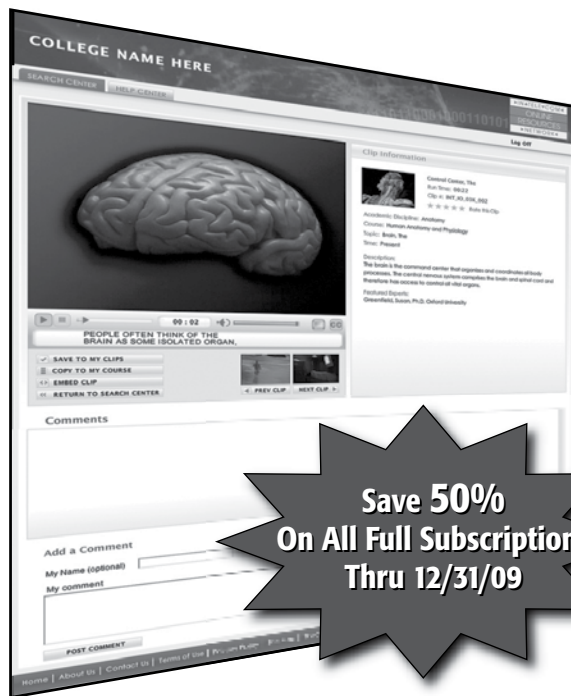
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Lost in Austin — "Why I Don't Blog"

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1. I have nothing to say.
2. My ego isn't *that* big.
3. I keep a real log/journal/diary.
4. Some thoughts are not meant to be shared.
5. The world is already drowning in useless information, blogs, twitters, skeeters, nannas, etcetera, et alia.
6. Life is too short.
7. There are only 24 hours in a day.
8. I have more years behind me than ahead of me.
9. I write a column for *Against the Grain*.
10. I write letters and cards to friends and family.

I was going to write about something else when I got sidetracked, an easy thing to do while reading an article embedded with hypertext.



If I'm not careful, I can find myself several Websites away and I've forgotten the item that I

thought that I'd been interested in. One of the links led to a well-known library journal where my eye caught mention of an apparently well-known blogger who had recently moved from another well-known library journal.

I had never heard of this blogger so how well known could she be, I thought to myself. But then I remembered how I have to ask my wife for help when **Will Shortz** offers a clue about a current actor, singer, or celebrity. Sure enough, one of my colleagues at work knew who I was talking about even when I got the eponymous blog title wrong.

This blogger writes anonymously. That troubles me. If you have something to say (that is a big IF in the so-called blogosphere), you should be willing to let the reader know who you are unless you are revealing a diabolical plot or state secret and you don't want to blow your cover. **Deep Throat** had both career and freedom to consider when he insisted on anonymity but in this case, the nameless cover demonstrates either that the blog is written by committee or that the blogger doesn't understand that one can be controversial and respectful at the same time, especially when one has a

good point to make and is encouraging polite discourse instead of the cheap shots that blogs seem to elicit.

I googled the *nom de plume*, a masked effort by the nameless blogger to be humorous or ironic or maybe just nameless. Who knows? No matter, I was directed to the appropriate Website and there was the blog in all its glory.

There was probably more insult and innuendo from both the blogger and the responders than incisive, witty, or informed opinion. The high and the mighty and the pretentious deserve to be brought down a notch or two from time to time but the leveling needs to be done with intelligence, wit, sarcasm, and barbed commentary armed with the facts. Where are the rhetorical skills that should accompany a blogger who, judging from the *nom de guerre*, wants to provoke? My curiosity has been satisfied. I won't be back to this site or any other blog site. Life is too short.

One of **John Stewart's** guests on his *The Daily Show* was **Arianna Huffington** (Google her and you will find a link to her appearance on

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The Daily Show). She chided **Mr. Stewart** for not having a blog. He was most respectful and a bit bemused as he tried to explain to her that his show was how he communicated and that the material that he and his writers rejected was dross and that he was afraid that after writing his show, he had nothing left. The hint that I took was that he was giving us his all, his best and had too much pride to put the rejected material out there for others to see.

One of my daily routines is to walk around the library. I want to ensure that we are keeping it clean and presentable. I count the number of laptops that students are using. I see how students are using the library, how they are congregating, where they go for quiet study, and how trusting they are when they leave backpacks and computers unattended while they go to pick up a print job, grab a cup of coffee, or use the facilities.

As I walk around, I often wander through the stacks, varying the route among LC classes, reference books, bound periodicals, and current periodicals. I despair at times at all that I don't know and how little I have read even compared with the small subset of all printed materials that we have collected here at **St. Edward's**

University. I look at our long run of the *Yale Review* and pull a dusty volume off the shelf, the one that contains issues from 1942-1943, the one closest to the month and year in which I was born. I recognize **Dorothy Canfield's** name and I even knew her short story, "The Knothole." In the Autumn 1942 issue, **Eudora Welty's** "Asphodel" appears. If I went through the other issues, I would find countless other stories and essays that would resonate some 66 years after their initial appearance. What is going to happen to all of those treasure troves of fact and fiction when we get rid of our bound journals as we must? They are not being consulted and we need to make room for additional study space. Perhaps I will request the two volumes that cover 1943, each one of which would provide a change of pace when I simply want a piece of good writing to accompany the smell and sound of a soft rain somewhere in rural Oregon. And those who contributed to *The Yale Review* will not have done so in vain.

There is the history section taunting me and my ignorance of the past. The science section is even more scornful of me, someone who, in high school, walked out of chemistry on the first day and signed up for Latin as an easy out. I could go on but you get the point. There are more than 100,000 volumes sitting on our shelves ready to share the learning, wis-

dom, and imagination of thousands of writers — scholars, poets, novelists, humorists. Where do I begin? Never mind, I have my own sub-set at home that I have selected to last me through retirement. And I won't even get through them because there are those other books that I have yet to buy or borrow.

If I want to blitz my friends and family with a thought or a fact about my life that I think they might be interested in, I post it on **Facebook**. That does not make me a blogger. If I posted something once or more a day, however, I would be suspect.

I would rather write letters and postcards and send them to friends and family. Each post card message is written especially for the recipient. Even when writing about the same, I try to vary the wording for my own sake if nothing else. If I used up my time blogging, I might not be able to write my forty or so postcards a month to readers important to me and who really care.

So if you are not a blogger but have considered entering the fray, consider instead just picking up pen and paper and writing a personal note to someone you love or whose friendship you treasure? Studies show that as we get older, we live longer, more satisfying lives when we have friends with whom we can share the good along with the pain. You won't regret it. 🐾

Issues in Vendor/Library Relations — Old

Column Editor: **Bob Nardini** (Group Director, Client Integration and Head Bibliographer, Coutts Information Services)
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Information Resources, which until recently was Collection Management, and for years before that was Collection Development, once librarians reworked a duty that had mainly consisted of taking order cards from professors when they got around to submitting them, used to center on new books.

That was when new books were so important that most libraries made sure they were the first thing you saw when walking in the front door. In the back, a lot of librarians spent good long careers choosing the latest books to fill their library's showpiece New Book Shelf, or running the approval plan that re-stocked it every week.

Lately, though, things have changed. Somehow the idea of new got old.

Like so many other troubles, maybe it began with journals. Once they became impossibly expensive, the new journals were nothing but a headache, a series of headaches really. You couldn't find them in the **OPAC**. Then it was one serials review after another. Meanwhile, do we sign on to the Big Deal or not? Then someone invented **JSTOR** and **Project MUSE**. These were exciting projects. We were getting somewhere.



Serials were fun again. Old serials, that is.

Then libraries re-discovered their special collections. Not that they'd forgotten them exactly, but the closest thing to today's airport **TSA** routines used to be applying to use the relics kept under lock and key in wood-paneled rooms that had the only decent tables and chairs — often unoccupied — in the entire library. Leave everything you have with me, please. Here's your pencil. By the way, we close at 4:30. See you Monday morning.

But digitization workshops and the Web turned that around and libraries figured out that they could put themselves on the map by mounting online displays of, well, their maps, not to mention their old letters, diaries, manuscripts, music, records, books, whatever.

With new books, you weren't allowed to do that and nobody would have tried in any case. Until **Google**.

As usual, **Google** changed everything. They went public in 2004, came away with a billion dollars or so, and set out to spend the cash. Within a few months they'd launched **Google Print**, which by now as **Google Book Search**, a project the company charmingly refers to as still in "beta," has digitized some seven million books, is on

course to digitize all the rest ever printed, and in the course of that to upend every last corner of the book world.

New books are there, yes, but anyone who cared to could have found them anyway, on **Amazon**, at **Barnes & Noble**, on publisher sites, and other places. All they'd find though is what the publishers served up to entice a reader to buy the book. Maybe an excerpt. A chapter, even. The jacket. The price. Some blurbs. Not much more.

Most by far of those seven **Google** million books, though, are old. People's attitude toward old books has always landed, usually, somewhere between uninterest and disdain. In *The Devil's Dictionary*, in fact, **Ambrose Bierce's** definition for the word "old" was: "In that stage of usefulness which is not inconsistent with general inefficiency, as an *old man*. Discredited by lapse of time and offensive to the popular taste, as an *old book*."

Suddenly the joke is on **Bierce**, though, because today all the action is in old books. **Google's** \$125 million settlement and 134-page agreement with the **Author's Guild** and **Association of American Publishers** was mostly about old books, the ones out-of-print but still in copyright, rights largely abandoned by authors and publishers until **Google** in effect decided to republish them. Now everyone is recalculating the worth of old books whose fate

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